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## 'Wild Observations at Archbold Biological Station'

By ARCHBOLD BIOLOGICAL STATION

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Deborah Mitchell describes her drawings on cow skulls during "Wild Observations at Archbold Biological Station."

DUSTIN ANGELL VIDEO/SCREENSHOT

Subscribers to Archbold's virtual event series received a special treat last week, a new and completely different type of virtual presentation: Wild Observations at Archbold Biological Station was the first-ever interactive art salon event hosted by Archbold. Conservation artist and environmental advocate Deborah Mitchell first came to Archbold in 2016 and has returned several times since to further her mission of educating and promoting conservation of Florida's wild spaces. Her latest project, Wild Observations, is a fusion of art and science aimed to prompt discussions about man's precarious relationship with nature and its implications.

Mitchell explained, “Why art and science? My motivation as a conservation artist is to help preserve the environment for future generations. The research and management of our wild places provide support for the air that we breathe, the food that we eat, and our water supply, and this affects everybody, no matter what you do in life.”

News-Sun readers may recall Deborah Mitchell’s visit to Archbold in November, which laid the foundation for this innovative event. Mitchell describes herself as a visual storyteller, using visual arts to enhance our understanding of why the environment is so vital to our health. The artist spent time in the scrub and in the labs with Archbold scientists Reed Bowman, Mark Deyrup and Hilary Swain, with Archbold educator Dustin Angell acting as photographer and videographer for the project. The resulting interviews, photos, and collections transformed over two months into a visually stunning and thought-provoking exploration of the connections between living things and why those connections matter.

Archbold Executive Director Hilary Swain remarked, “Having Deborah here has lifted us in many ways. One of the many wonderful things about working with artists and scientists is this confluence of observations, creativity, and curiosity and the wonderful conversations that come from that.”

The virtual event featured alternating short videos and slideshows with commentary from Mitchell and the Archbold scientists on topics ranging from ranchlands, wetlands conservation and water flow, to bird communications, to insects and pollinators. A short presentation on bear tracking and a discussion with Archbold’s Predator Prey Program Director, Joe Guthrie, ended the exhibition.

On the surface, art and science may appear as opposing concepts, but the fusion of the two works to spark dialogue in directions we might otherwise overlook. Dustin Angell was intrigued, “I had the pleasure of being behind the camera, photographing Deborah and recording her conversations with the researchers. She kept us all on our toes with her unanticipated questions and new perspectives, which is the fun part of working with artists. That, and all the cool art they make.”

Wild Observations at Archbold Biological Station may be viewed on Archbold’s Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ArchboldBiologicalStation/> or YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ArchboldExpeditions>. The visual art exhibit Wild Observations will be on display at the Marjorie and James Sanger Gallery in Key West from May 6-27, 2021. For more information, please visit [www.debmitchellart.com](http://www.debmitchellart.com).